

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BRUSSE 05876 151414Z

51

ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-07 NSC-10 SPC-03 SS-20 RSC-01

CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 ACDA-19 L-03 OMB-01 TRSE-00

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R 151135Z OCT 73

FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8903

SECDEF WASHDC

INFO AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

USDELMC

USNMR SHAPE

USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 5876

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAFS: MARR, US, BE

SUBJECT: STATUS OF FORCES

REF: BRUSSELS 3706

1. AMBASSADOR VERWILGHEN, PRESIDENT OF THE BELGIAN INTER-MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE FOR SHAPE, TOLD US ON OCTOBER 10 THAT, AS A RESULT OF OUR MOST RECENT DEMARCHE (REFTEL), THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY FIND A WAY TO EXEMPT US FORCES AT KLEINE BROGEL AND FUTURE LOC CITES FROM PAYMENT OF TAXES ON GASOLINE PURCHASED FOR THEIR PRIVATE VEHICLES. HE WAS UNABLE TO SAY JUST HOW THIS WOULD BE ACCOMPLISHED BUT INDICATED THAT AN INFORMAL ARRANGEMENT WOULD PROBABLY BE SUGGESTED, AFTER THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE COMPLETES IT STAFFWORK IN A FEW WEEKS' TIME.

2. VERWILGHEN SAID THAT OUR PROPOSAL FOR EXEMPTION FROM ROAD TAXES FOR PRIVATE VEHICLES HAD BEEN FIRMLY RESISTED BY THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE, AND HE SAID THE PROSPECTS FOR PROGRESS ON
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PAGE 02 BRUSSE 05876 151414Z

THE SUBJECT WERE BLEAK.

3. EMBOFF EXPRESSED SATISFACTION WITH THE ENCOURAGING NEWS ABOUT THE GASOLINE TAX AND DISAPPOINTMENT OVER THE REPORTED REFUSAL TO CONSIDER AN EXEMPTION FROM THE ROAD TAX. EMBOFF REITERATED THE POINTS MADE EARLIER (REFTEL) AND SAID IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO EXPLAIN TO CONGRESS WHY SOME TWO HUNDRED US SERVICEMEN IN BELGIUM WERE DENIED A PRIVILEGE GRANTED TO TWO THOUSAND OTHERS SIMPLY BECAUSE OF ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATION. WHILE INCLINED TO AGREE WITH THE REASONABLENESS OF OUR POINT OF VIEW, VERWILGHEN HELD OUT LITTLE HOPE THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY COULD CHANGE THE FINANCE MINISTRY'S STAND.

4. COMMENT. OUR APPROACH ON THIS ISSUE HAS ESSENTIALLY CONSISTED OF AN APPEAL TO THE BELGIANS' SENSE OF EQUITY, RATHER THAN A CLAIM OF LEGAL RIGHTS, AND THEY BELIEVE THEY HAVE MET US HALF-WAY. THEY WOULD BE ON FIRM LEGAL GROUND (STRICT APPLICATION OF THE NATO SOFA) IN DENYING BOTH OF THE EXEMPTIONS WE REQUESTED. WE BELIEVE THAT, BY PURSUING THIS FURTHER, WE WOULD RUN A RISK OF LOSING THE BENEFITS ABOUT TO BE CEDED. END COMMENT.
BOOCHEVER

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